IUB Africanists Win NEH Grants to Use New Technologies

Two highly competitive grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities have been awarded to IU Bloomington professors to explore the use of computers in teaching and learning about the humanities. The two “teaching with technology” grants were given to art historian Patrick McNaughton and archaeologist Jeanne Sept.

McNaughton is collaborating with four other colleagues, John Hanson (History, IUB), Ruth Stone (Folklore Institute, IUB), Brian Winchester (Center on Global Change and World Peace), and art historian Dele Jegede of Indiana State University in Terre Haute, to develop units in their respective disciplines for a CD-ROM on Africa.

“Our aim is to use the disciplines to present a broad spectrum of information on Africa and its populations. [The CD-ROM] will be an outstanding introduction to Africa to those who don’t know too much about it... For any kind of idea or information you are interested in, you can approach it from different angles, different perspectives”, said McNaughton.

Although the CD-ROM can be used as a supplement to the recent third edition of the popular textbook, Africa, edited by IUB’s Phyllis Martin and Patrick O’Meara (Indiana University Press), it should also be useful as an autonomous source of information on Africa. The $180,000 project is expected to be completed by January, 1998.

Sept’s two-year project, “Prehistoric Puzzles: Collaborative Problem-Solving with Internet-Based Archaeology Tools,” is being developed with co-director Martin Siegel of IU’s Center for Excellence in Education. Designed for the introductory level, the project will produce a World Wide Web site that teaches students to think like archaeologists through “discovery learning.”

Using data from actual research sites and from different time periods in Africa, and given a standard set of analytical tools, students learn to take responsibility for doing the research themselves, drawing their own conclusions, and submitting themselves to a peer review process.

While instructors may set the general goals to be achieved, it is the students who discover what the interesting issues are, find ways to solve them, and in general build their skills at conducting research. “This project provides the opportunity to get students studying archaeology actively involved in solving puzzles using real data,” said Sept.

Siegel added that the team will move beyond the point-and-click nature of the Web to create a new set of interactive tools, to be called “Time Web”, which creates a sophisticated interactive timeline sensitive to various categories. “It will allow you to understand changes over time and see various connections between one category and another,” he said.

The $190,000 project is expected to be operational by the summer of 1998 and will be globally accessible. Sept says that having all the instructional tools written in Java should encourage colleagues from elsewhere to format their own data in such a way that they can interact with her database and thereby build on it.

— Mike Wright
Herald Times

School of Journalism Welcomes Noted Alumnus, Olantunji Dare

The 1995 recipient of the Nieman Foundation’s Louis M. Lyons Award for Conscience and Integrity in Journalism, Olantunji Dare, returned to the IU School of Journalism October 18.

Speaking in a room named after Ernie Pyle, another Indiana-trained journalist famous for honesty and courage, Dare recounted his years working as chairman of the editorial board for Nigeria’s most prestigious English language daily, The Guardian.

The government of Nigeria, a country that once boasted one of the strongest traditions of press freedom in Africa, has in recent years tried to revoke the right of media to report dissenting views, he said.

In 1994, the Nigerian government completely shut down The Guardian.

When a court ruled that the closure was illegal, the government insisted that The Guardian’s doors remain closed until it received a formal apology from the paper’s board of directors.

The paper’s publisher, chastened by the unwarranted pressure from the authorities and eager to resume business, was willing to submit. But, when he asked Dare to join him, Dare refused.

“The Guardian had broken no laws. I refused to apologize for a wrong that I had not committed,” said Dare.

The publisher apologized anyway, and The Guardian was allowed to go to press. But, Dare resigned rather than work for the paper.

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